

## Dragonflies in Worcestershire 2017 with the spotlight for the second year on the Common Clubtail Dragonfly *Gomphus vulgatissimus*.

Mike Averill

The weather always dictates if and when adults are seen in the insect world and this year we had an extraordinary weather pattern resulting in very early emergences of dragonflies after some warm weather from February to April and a completion of the seasonal activity rather earlier than normal as temperatures dropped below average from mid July to September.

The early start to the year meant that many species peaked in the last week in May and not in June as would be expected. Some damselflies like the Large red *Pyrhosoma nymphula*; Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*; Beautiful demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* and Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum* all emerged earlier than in any of the last 11 years. The Banded Demoiselle particularly, appeared to be doing well and flew in the sort of large numbers that have not been seen since 2009. The Beautiful Demoiselle made good use of the fine weather and continued to expand in to the outskirts of Birmingham along the River Cole. The Small Red-eyed Damselfly consolidated its breeding area in the south of the county and was seen on the huge new lake south of the M50 motorway at Ripple by Andy Warr and also in the north near Acocks Green by Des Jennings.

Some years ago in the annual dragonfly report for 2012 there was a reference to a blue coloured form of Southern Hawker *Aeshna Cyanea* and once again one was seen on the dragonfly walk In Monkwood in the summer. This is particularly interesting because Paddy Harrison noticed these aberrations several times when he was the warden and in exactly the same place. There is still no definitive explanation for the colour difference and a project has been proposed for consideration by a university department.

The Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva* continued to do well on the River Avon and surprisingly single individuals were seen at Hillditch Pool for the second year running, posing the question how long can such a small population sustain itself so far from the main group at Pershore.

The impending publication of the Nature of the Malverns book prompted some survey work in the area and many new and old ponds were visited. Not perhaps thought of as being the best place to go to see dragonflies because of the preponderance of deep cold quarry pools, there have actually been 19 species recorded over the years with Castlemorton and Hollybed Common being local hotspots.

In all 24 species were recorded this year out of the county total of 29 with the rarest being the Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope* (Ph) (01) seen at Fox Hollies, Acocks Green by Des Jennings on the 4<sup>th</sup> August making it only the fifth time it has been seen since the first sighting in 2000. After a gap of two years a more regular visitor, the Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii* (Ph) (02) was seen at Pirton Pool on the 20<sup>th</sup> June. Attempts were made to find emerging adults in September but without success.

At Hartlebury Common, other than at Hillditch Pool, was a disappointing year with the dry warm weather not helping freshwater invertebrates as the two water bodies, the Bog and Rush Pool both went dry quite early in the year.



01. Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope* male. Mike Averill.

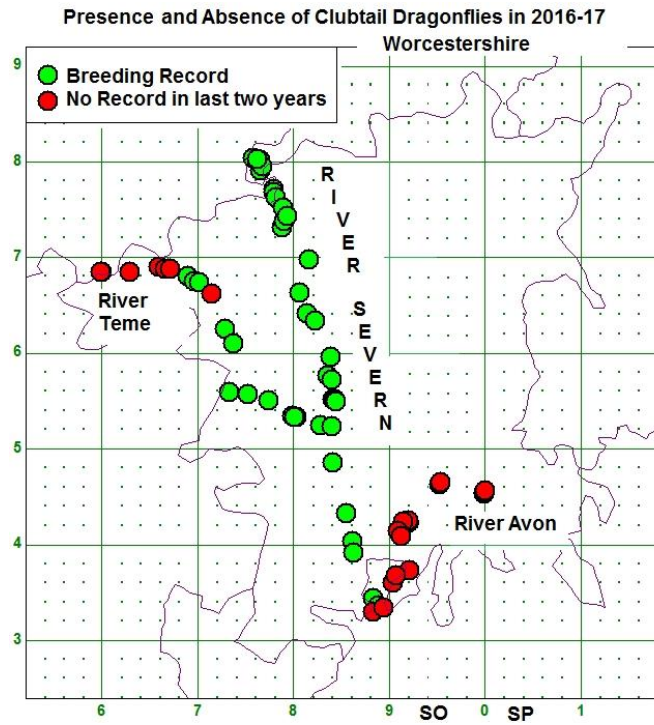


02. Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii* male. Mike Averill.

### The Club-tailed or Common Clubtail Dragonfly *Gomphus vulgatissimus*

It is only right to continue to shine the spotlight on the Clubtail this year as this has been the second year of a national close look at this scarce species. It appears that there are changes going on nationally with losses on some rivers and gains in others. In what might be considered its heartland Worcestershire has had a reasonable year on the Severn with the second highest emergence for seven years and a similar state on the River Teme to last year. Worries about the lack of Clubtails on the River Avon were confirmed with no adults or signs of emergence being found anywhere along the river. This decline is puzzling as there is no apparent concern about river quality and nine other dragonfly species are doing quite well on the Avon including the newly colonised Scarce Chaser. The map (03) shows the situation over the last two years and although there appears to be a loss at the top of the River Teme, the upper reaches near Tenbury only ever had records during what was a short period of good years in the late 1990's. A close watch is needed however,

in case the same withdrawal affecting the Avon is seen on the Teme as well.



03. Presence and absence of Clubtail Dragonfly *Gomphus vulgatissimus* 2016-17

Images

- 01. Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope* male. Mike Averill.
- 02. Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii* male. Mike Averill.
- 03. Presence and absence of Clubtail Dragonfly *Gomphus vulgatissimus* 2016-17